

PERSHING MURAL PROJECT CURRICULUM

Learning From the Past, Understanding the Present, and Discovering the Future



THE PERSHING MURAL ~ A NEBRASKA CULTURAL LANDMARK

Connecting with the Pershing Mural

*In this lesson, students are invited to analyze the artistic elements and subject matter of the Mural using the “Look * Describe * Think * Connect” method and apply the process when viewing other art in the future. Students will be invited to complete a worksheet noting their findings.*

Included in this Lesson:

- Lesson Plan: Connecting with the Pershing Mural
- Power point: Mysteries of the Pershing Mural
- PDF Handout: Look, Describe, Think and Connect
- Pershing Mural Digital Image

Nebraska Standards Addressed:

Present: FA 8.2.3.a Identify and describe themes and styles in works of art.

Connect: FA 8.2.3.c Compare and contrast various interpretations of themes, styles, and mood.

Respond: FA 8.2.3.d Explain why a work of art can evoke different interpretations and how artwork is interpreted and evaluated by the way it is displayed or presented

Create: FA 8.2.4.d Explain how images and objects are used to convey a story, familiar experience, or connection to the world.

Objectives:

- The students will use the MFAH template to engage with and interpret the Pershing Mural.
- The students will complete a written inventory based on the template to describe their perceptions of the Mural.
- The students will enter into class discussion to share ideas and interpretations.

Grade Level:

Written at 6th Grade Level (educators are encouraged to adjust the lesson to meet needs of Pre-K to 12th Grade)

Materials Needed:

Digital or hard copy image of the Pershing Mural, Copies of worksheet, pencils

Time Requirement:

1-2 (50-minute) class sessions

Vocabulary:

Line: A line is the fundamental element in all drawing considered to be a moving dot and is used as a visual definition of shapes. It is the most basic element in drawing. Line variation—the use of a variety of lines including width, length, texture, and thickness add interest to art. Lines serve as a visual definition of shapes and play a vital role in expressing emotion, form, texture, and motion.

Shape: Shape is any two-dimensional space that may be created with lines, color, texture, or material type. There are two main types of shapes: geometric (circles, squares, triangles, etc.) and organic (what can be found in nature such as plants animals, and rocks).

Color: Color is light reflected by an object. Colors can be muted or intense, and the intensity of colors can create different moods and emotions. Hue is another name for color.

Composition: Composition is the arrangement of the visual elements in a piece of art using the principles of art and design: balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, pattern, rhythm, unity, and variety. It gives the art structure and conveys the intent of the artist, helping the viewer to take in the whole work of art and settle on the main subject(s) of the work.

Materials: Materials are what the art is made from. They can have different qualities: smooth, rough, hard, soft, heavy, light, fragile, indestructible, etc. Artists choose materials because of their qualities and the message they want to convey.

Subject Matter: Subject matter can be subjective but usually includes three main components: the focal point of the piece, the form used to create it, and the intention behind the artist's creation. It is what the artwork is trying to portray.

Artistic License: Artistic License is when an artist interprets something in their own way without keeping in mind or being accountable for accuracy. For example, a painter might use artistic license to exaggerate the colors or shapes in a still life in order to create a more striking image.

Direct Instruction:

The Museum of Fine Arts in Houston has provided a wonderful template to help students practice looking at art. Our thanks go out to the Museum for allowing their content to be used in this lesson.

<https://www.mfah.org/learn/practice-looking-art>

Engaging with a work of art is a meaningful and lasting experience. This four-step process encourages close examination and careful analysis with any work of art, whether viewed in the Museum, in the classroom, or at home. In this four-step process, the students will be asked to 1) Look, 2) Describe, 3) Think, and 4) Connect.

Guided and Independent Practice:

With a digital image of the Pershing Mural enlarged and displayed for the entire class to view as well as images on tablets or hard copy for each student, help the students to complete this guided inventory, giving them time prompts as needed. The students can work independently or in small groups. (Note: A PDF of this worksheet is available for download.)

Look * Describe * Think * Connect Worksheet

Look at the entire Mural and pay close attention to details for one minute. Mentally take an inventory of everything you see and what stands out to you. Now look away from the Mural image; you will have one minute to write down every detail you can remember.

Now look at the Mural image again and take two minutes to make a list of anything you overlooked.

Now it is time to **Describe** all the things you see in the Mural. We know the Mural is made up of more than 760,000 one-inch ceramic tile pieces—this is the material that was used in the creation of the art.

Describe the use of Lines:

Describe the use of Shape:

Describe the use of Color:

Describe the use of Composition (arrangement of visual elements):

What is the Subject Matter:

Now use expressive language to write five sentences that describe what you see in detail. For example, instead of saying, "I see the sky," you could say, "I see a dark, foreboding sky full of heavy clouds that march across the painting."

Now is it time to **Think**, interpret, and assign meaning to the Mural.

What stories are taking place?

What setting, time or place is depicted?

What is the mood (happiness, excitement, anger) of the work?

Does the mood change depending upon which part of the Mural you are viewing?

What do you think the artists Thiessen and Hammon were trying to communicate through the creation of the Mural?

Finally, it is time to **Connect** this Mural to you to see how it relates to your own life.

Does this work of art remind you of anything? Have you ever seen art of this kind before?

How does the Mural make you feel?

Do you see any connection between the action portrayed in the Mural and what you may experience in your own life?

How is the Mural different from other art you have encountered (e.g. in an art gallery or museum)?

Once the students have completed their worksheet and with pencils down, conduct a class-wide discussion of their “findings”. Encourage students to share what insights they gained from analyzing and interpreting the Mural.

Following are some more in-depth questions for discussion that can be posed to the students depending upon class time.

- There was no artist statement from the Mural's creators, Bill Hammon and Leonard Thiessen, so we're not sure what fueled their vision. Do you have any ideas?
- We don't know if the artists were instructed, as part of their commission, as to which specific figures to include in the Mural or if they were given artistic license. What are your thoughts?
- We aren't sure what is happening at the rally or parade. Is there a debate? Is someone protesting?
- We see someone carrying a flag; are they in uniform? What are the artists trying to convey?
- We are not sure who some of the figures represent but we can make some guesses when we see a balcony scene. Could it be Romeo and Juliet?
- We are unsure of what the various abstract lines represent. Could they be roads or rivers or trees or geological formations or are they included for artistic interest and have no meaning?
- Is there a "boot" or "foot" depicted in lines? What could that mean, if it means anything?
- Are the lines above the musicians a music staff? Are they artistic lines and nothing more?
- With the music trio, can you identify the instruments? Is that an unusual combination? Why do suppose those instruments were chosen?
- Could the State of Nebraska and its topography be represented in the Mural? Do you see any lakes or rivers symbolized?

Evaluation:

The students will be evaluated on:

- 1) Use of their time
- 2) Fully completing their worksheet
- 3) Participating in small group and class discussion

Closure:

Engaging in the arts strengthens creativity and our imaginations. It improves critical thinking skills and can make a difference in our personal growth and development as a society. Art is a great messenger of emotions—it has the power to give us a sense of focus allowing us to slow down and exist in the moment. The Arts help build cross cultural and communication bridges.

Resources:

Museum of Fine Arts Houston: Practice Looking at Art
<https://www.mfah.org/learn/practice-looking-art> *Special Thanks to Melanie Fahey and the Museum of Fine Arts Houston for granting permission to use content from their website for this lesson (3-25-24).*

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